



# October 2003

## EPA Celebrates **Children's Health Month**

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**P**rotecting children from environmental health risks is fundamental to the mission of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Children are not little adults. They may be at greater risk from harmful environmental pollutants. Consider the following:

- Children's neurological, immunological, digestive, and other bodily systems are still developing;
- Children eat more food, drink more fluids, and breathe more air than adults in proportion to their body mass; and
- Children's behavior patterns — such as crawling and placing objects in their mouths — may result in greater exposure to environmental contaminants.

Because of these characteristics, children may not be sufficiently protected by regulatory standards that are based on risks to adults.

**C**hildren need clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and safe food to eat. During Children's Health Month, EPA highlights its efforts to protect children from environmental harm. Here is a sampling of what EPA is doing to protect children.

### Helping Children Breathe Easier

Both indoor and outdoor air pollution can adversely affect children's health. An estimated 6.3 million children under 18 years of age had asthma in 2001. In 1994-96, children with asthma missed approximately 14 million school days a year.

- **Asthma Campaign:** EPA and the Ad Council have developed a national media campaign, in English and Spanish, to educate parents about how to manage their children's asthma to prevent serious attacks. For more information, visit [www.noattacks.org](http://www.noattacks.org).



- **Clean School Bus USA:** Across the country, 24 million children ride school buses, most of which run on diesel fuel. Diesel emissions can cause respiratory disease and exacerbate long-term conditions, such as asthma. The goals of the Clean School Bus USA initiative are to eliminate unnecessary idling, replace the oldest buses with new ones, and equip existing buses with advanced emission control technologies. See [www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus](http://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus).
- **Air Quality Index (AQI):** AQI forecasts and real-time air quality data are now available year-round and include information about particle pollution. Currently, AQI forecasts are available for more than 300 cities across the United States.
- **Smart Growth and Children's Health:** EPA supports smart growth opportunities that replace some motor vehicle trips with walking, biking and clean forms of transit. These strategies, in turn, help control the adverse effects of air pollutants on children's health. Studies show that two to three times more children would walk and bike to school if they lived in walkable neighborhoods.

## Protecting Young Children from Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

About five million young children are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes. Secondhand smoke can cause serious health effects, such as respiratory illness, ear infections, and asthma attacks.

- **EPA's "Smoke-Free Homes" Pledge** is a nationwide campaign to encourage parents to protect their children from secondhand smoke by making their homes and cars smoke-free. More than 15,000 pledges have been made across the country and more than 400 organizations nationwide are actively promoting the campaign. Visit [www.epa.gov/smokefree](http://www.epa.gov/smokefree).

## Making Schools Healthier

More than 53 million children and almost 3 million adults spend time in approximately 117,000 public and private school buildings, many with environmental conditions that inhibit learning and pose increased risks to children and staff. EPA is taking action — visit [www.epa.gov/schools](http://www.epa.gov/schools).



### • **New IAQ Design Tools for Schools Website:**

This website will help communities and design professionals integrate good indoor air quality practices into school construction and renovation projects. Visit [www.epa.gov/iaq/schooldesign](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schooldesign).

- **Tools for Schools:** EPA's Indoor Air Quality *Tools for Schools* Kit is an easy-to-use guide to support schools in preventing and solving indoor air quality problems. More than 10,000 schools have taken steps to improve their indoor air quality. See [www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/toolkit.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/toolkit.html).

## Protecting Children from Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning in children may cause lowered intelligence, impaired hearing, hyperactivity, and other health repercussions. Approximately 434,000 American children have elevated blood lead levels.

- **Lead Hazard Reduction:** EPA spends \$2.5 million annually on developing lead hazard reduction regulations and public education. The Lead Disclosure Rule has resulted in settlements involving lead abatement, thereby reducing children's exposure to lead.
- **EPA Partnership In Rhode Island:** Children in Rhode Island are still lead poisoned at rates above the national average, and urban children have rates two to three times that of children living elsewhere in the state. EPA has worked with partners to target education, enforcement and remediation where it is most needed.

## Keeping Pesticides and Other Toxic Chemicals Away from Children

Children can be exposed to pesticides in their diets and drinking water, or through activities at home, play, and school. Too much exposure to some pesticides or chemicals may lead to a variety of health effects, such as acute poisoning, disruption of the hormone and immune systems, respiratory problems, neurological damage and cancer.

- **“Lock It Up” Campaign:** A collaboration with the National Safety Council and the American Association of Poison Control Centers, the “Lock It Up” Campaign encourages parents and caregivers to store household pesticides and chemicals up high and in a locked cabinet. Visit [www.epa.gov/pesticides/regulating/storage.htm](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/regulating/storage.htm).
- **Poison Prevention: Read the Label First! Community Action Kit:** EPA and the National Safety Council developed a tool kit to raise awareness about poisonings caused by improper use and storage of household chemicals and pesticides. See [www.epa.gov/opptintr/labeling/rtlf](http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/labeling/rtlf).



## Protecting Children from Too Much Sun

One or two blistering sunburns in childhood may double the lifetime risk of developing melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. Overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause other serious health effects, including cataracts and immune system suppression.

- **SunWise School Program:** Currently over 7,800 schools in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. are registered in the SunWise School Program.

## Helping Children Drink Safer Water

EPA has proposed two drinking water regulations, building on protections established in recent years.

- **Long Term 2 Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule:** This proposed rule is intended to reduce illness from *Cryptosporidium* and other pathogens, which can cause acute gastrointestinal illness, most severely in infants, elderly people, and people with weakened immune systems.
- **Stage 2 Disinfectants and Disinfection Byproducts Rule (DBP):** This rule would reduce DBP exposure to customers throughout a water utility's distribution system. Studies have shown a link between DBP exposure and bladder, rectal, and colon cancers, as well as spontaneous abortion, stillbirth, neural tube defects, pre-term delivery, intrauterine growth retardation, and low birth weight.

## Increasing Knowledge of the Effects of Environmental Contaminants on Children

We need to understand more about the role of environmental contaminants in causing or aggravating childhood diseases and developmental disorders.

- **America's Children and the Environment: Measures of Contaminants, Body Burdens, and Illnesses:** EPA reports on trends in levels of environmental contaminants in air, water, food, and soil; concentrations of contaminants measured in the bodies of women and children; and childhood illnesses that may be influenced by environmental contaminants. See the report at [www.epa.gov/envirohealth/children/](http://www.epa.gov/envirohealth/children/)
- **National Children's Study:** This study will examine the effects of environmental influences on the health and development of more than 100,000 children across the United States. The study is authorized by the Children's Health Act of 2000 and will drive our actions to protect children for decades to come.
- **Research:** EPA spends \$18 million annually to improve science, including funding Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research with the Department of Health and Human Services.

## Identifying, Preventing, and Managing Environmentally-Related Illnesses in Children

**H**ealth care providers need to learn about health problems related to the environment in order to meet the needs of the public.

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** The American Academy of Pediatrics is publishing the second edition of the *Handbook of Pediatric Environmental Health*, a comprehensive desk reference for pediatricians to identify, prevent, and treat environmental health problems in children. EPA is contributing to printing and distribution costs.
- **Health Care and Pesticides:** EPA and the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, in partnership with the United States Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Labor, and health professionals nationwide, are supporting a national initiative to integrate health information related to pesticides into the education and practice of health care providers.

## Protecting Children Beyond our Borders

**C**hildren's environmental health issues span the globe and cross political boundaries. The priorities of developed and developing countries sometimes differ, but they are similar enough to drive international cooperation for technical, economic, and moral reasons.

- **Children's Environmental Health Indicators:** EPA is working with partners to develop global children's environmental health indicators, as proposed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In North America, the environmental ministers of Canada, Mexico, and the United States agreed to publish a report on children's environmental health indicators. See the ministers' resolution and recommendations for indicators on the Commission for Environmental Cooperation website: [www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org).

## Teaching the Generations

**E**PA continues to work with youth-based organizations, representing nearly 15 million youth, to incorporate children's environmental health into their ongoing programs. To enhance this effort, EPA launched a new intergenerational program to bring children and older adults together on environmental health issues.



- **Youth Programs:** Several thousand Junior Girl Scouts have earned the Environmental Health Badge and 65,000 youth in tribal nations have created environmental health programs.
- **Intergenerational Programs:** EPA is working with the Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement to develop materials to recruit and train older adults to educate their communities on environmental hazards that affect the health of children. EPA is also working with Generations United to host a national conference on "Intergenerational Approaches to Environmental Health."

**C**hildren, by their very nature, deserve our continuous attention. Their bodies are different than adults, their behaviors are different, and their interactions with the environment are different. Protecting the health of children is a compelling inducement to improve our environment.

EPA celebrates Children's Health Month during October, but will continue its efforts on behalf of children throughout the year and in the years ahead.

For more information, visit EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection website: [www.epa.gov/children](http://www.epa.gov/children).

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